

Introduction

The following standard instructions should be used in all civil cases in which they are appropriate. Any objections to any of these instructions and any request for variation should be brought to the court's attention at or before the final pretrial conference.

Court's Instruction No. 1

The functions of the court and the jury

Members of the jury, you have seen and heard all of the evidence and the arguments of the attorneys. Now I will instruct you on the law that applies to this case.

You have two duties as a jury. Your first duty is to decide the facts from the evidence in this case. This is your job, and yours alone.

Your second duty is to apply the law that I give you to the facts. You must follow these instructions, even if you disagree with them. Each of the instructions is important, and you must follow all of them.

You must perform your duties fairly and impartially. In deciding your verdict, you must not allow sympathy, bias, prejudice, fear, or public opinion to influence you. [You should not be influenced by any person's race, color, religion, national ancestry, or sex.] The parties to this case and the public expect that you will carefully and impartially consider all of the evidence in the case, follow the law that I give you, and reach a just verdict regardless of the consequences.

Nothing I say now, and nothing I said or did during the trial, is meant to indicate any opinion on my part about what the facts are or about what your verdict should be. It is not my function to determine the facts in this case. That function belongs to you.

[Bracketed portion to be given where appropriate.]

Court's Instruction No. 2

Parties are entitled to equal consideration

You should consider and decide this case as an action between persons of equal standing in the community, and holding the same or similar stations in life. Each party is entitled to the same fair consideration. [A corporation is entitled to the same fair consideration as a private individual.] All persons [and corporations,] stand equal before the law and are to be dealt with as equals in a court of justice.

[Bracketed portion to be given where appropriate.]

Court's Instruction No. 3

The evidence

As I stated earlier, it is your duty to determine the facts. In determining the facts, you must consider only the evidence that I have admitted in the case. The evidence consists of the testimony of the witnesses[,] [testimony that was read to you from depositions,] [and] the exhibits admitted in evidence [, and stipulations].

[A stipulation is an agreement between both sides [that certain facts are true] [that a person would have given certain testimony]].

[I have taken judicial notice of certain facts that may be regarded as matters of common knowledge. You are required to accept these facts as proved.]

Court's Instruction No. 4

Deposition testimony

During the trial, certain testimony was presented to you by the reading of a deposition. Deposition testimony is entitled to the same consideration as testimony that was given in court. You are to judge its truthfulness and accuracy, and you are to weigh and consider it, insofar as possible, in the same way as if the witness had been present and testified from the witness stand.

Court's Instruction No. 5

What is not evidence

Certain things are not evidence. I will list them for you.

First, testimony [and exhibits] that I struck from the record, or that I told you to disregard, is [are] not evidence and must not be considered.

Second, anything that you may have seen or heard outside the courtroom is not evidence and must be entirely disregarded. [This includes any press, radio, or television reports that you may have seen or heard. Such reports are not evidence, and your verdict must not be influenced in any way by such publicity.]

Third, questions and objections by the lawyers are not evidence. Attorneys have a duty to object when they believe a question is improper. You should not be influenced by any objection or by my ruling on it.

Fourth, the lawyers' statements and arguments to you are not evidence. The purposes of these statements and arguments is to discuss the issues and the evidence. If the evidence as you remember it is different from what the lawyers said, your memory is what counts.

[Bracketed portion to be given where appropriate]

Court's Instruction No. 6

Definition of “direct” and “circumstantial” evidence

Some of you may have heard the phrases “direct evidence” and “circumstantial evidence.” Direct evidence is direct proof of a fact, such as testimony by a witness about what that witness personally saw or heard or did. Circumstantial evidence is indirect evidence, in other words it is proof of one or more facts that point to the existence or non-existence of another fact. You are to consider both direct and circumstantial evidence. The law allows you to give equal weight to both types of evidence, but it is up to you to decide how much weight to give to any evidence in the case.

Court's Instruction No. 7

Jury should consider all the evidence

You are to consider all of the evidence in determining your verdict. However, that does not mean that you must accept all of the evidence as true or accurate.

Court's Instruction No. 8

Common sense - Inferences

You should use common sense in considering the evidence, and you should consider the evidence in light of your own observations in life.

In our lives, we often look at one fact and conclude from that fact that another fact exists. In law we call this an “inference.” You are allowed to make reasonable inferences. Any inferences that you make must be reasonable and must be based on the evidence in the case.

Court's Instruction No. 9

Testimony of witnesses (deciding what to believe)

In determining the facts in this case, you may have to decide which testimony to believe and which testimony not to believe. You may believe everything a witness says, or part of it, or none of it. You will also have to decide what weight, if any, to give to the testimony of each witness.

In considering the testimony of any witness, you may take into account:

- the opportunity and ability of the witness to see or hear or know the things that the witness testified about;
- [- the witness's age;]
- the witness's memory;
- the witness's intelligence;
- any interest the witness may have in the outcome of the case, and any bias or prejudice the witness may have;
- the witness's manner while testifying;
- the reasonableness of the witness's testimony in light of all the evidence in the case; and
- any other factors that bear on believability.

The weight of the evidence as to a particular fact does not necessarily depend on the number of witnesses who testify. You may find the testimony of a smaller number of witnesses to be more persuasive than that of a greater number.

[Bracketed portion to be given where appropriate, e.g. in the case of a child witness.]

Court's Instruction No. 10

Impeachment of witness

A witness may be discredited or “impeached” by contradictory evidence, by, among other things, a showing that he or she testified falsely concerning a material matter, or by evidence that at some other time the witness has said or done something that is inconsistent with the witness’ testimony.

If you believe that any witness has been impeached, then you must determine whether to believe the witness’s testimony in whole, in part, or not at all, and how much weight to give to that testimony.

Court's Instruction No. 11

Attorney interviewing witness

It is proper for an attorney to interview a witness for the purpose of learning what testimony the witness will give. The fact that the witness has talked to an attorney does not, by itself, reflect negatively on the truth of the witness's testimony.

Court's Instruction No. 12

“Expert” witnesses

You have heard a witness [witnesses] give opinions about matters requiring special knowledge or skill. You should judge this testimony in the same way that you judge the testimony of any other witness. The fact that such a person has given an opinion does not mean that you are required to accept it. Give the testimony whatever weight you think it deserves, considering the reasons given for the opinion, the witness's qualifications, and all of the other evidence in the case.

Court's Instruction No. 13

Character evidence

You have heard [reputation/opinion] evidence about the character trait of [name of witness] for truthfulness [or untruthfulness]. You should consider this evidence in deciding the weight that you will give to _____'s testimony.

[Bracketed material to be given where appropriate]

Court's Instruction No. 14

Burden of proof

In a civil lawsuit like this one, the burden is on the plaintiff to prove every essential element of his or her claim by a “preponderance of the evidence.”

A preponderance of the evidence simply means evidence that persuades you that the plaintiff's claim is more likely true than not true.

In deciding whether any fact has been proven by a preponderance of the evidence, you may, unless otherwise instructed, consider the testimony of all the witnesses, regardless of who may have called them, and all the exhibits received in evidence, regardless of who may have produced them.

If the proof establishes each essential element of the plaintiff's claim by a preponderance of the evidence, then you should find for the plaintiff as to that claim.

If the proof fails to establish any essential element of the plaintiff's claim by a preponderance of the evidence [as to any particular defendant], then you should find for [the] [that] defendant as to that claim.

Court's Instruction No. 15

Selection of foreperson - verdict

Upon retiring to the jury room, select one of your number as your foreperson. The foreperson will preside over your deliberations and will be your representative here in court.

Forms of verdict have been prepared for you.

[Read the forms of verdict.]

Take these forms to the jury room, and when you have reached unanimous agreement on the verdict, your foreperson will fill in and date the appropriate form, and each of you will sign it.

Court's Instruction No. 16

Communication with Court

I do not anticipate that you will need to communicate with me. If you do, however, the only proper way is in writing, signed by the foreperson, or if he or she is unwilling to do so, by some other juror, and given to the court security officer.

If any communication is made, it should not indicate your numerical division.

Court's Instruction No. 17

Disagreement among jurors

The verdict must represent the considered judgment of each juror. Your verdict must be unanimous.

You should make every reasonable effort to reach a verdict. In doing so, you should consult with one another, express your own views, and listen to the views of your fellow jurors. Discuss your differences with an open mind. Do not hesitate to re-examine your own views and change your opinion if you come to believe it is wrong. But you should not surrender your honest beliefs about the weight or effect of evidence solely because of the opinions or your fellow jurors or solely for the purpose of returning an unanimous verdict.

All of you should give fair consideration to all the evidence and deliberate with the goal of reaching a verdict which is consistent with the individual judgment of each juror.

You are impartial judges of the facts. Your sole interest is to determine the truth from the evidence in the case.

Court's Instruction No. 18

Return of jury after polling

A poll of the jury indicates that you may not have reached a unanimous verdict. For this reason, I am asking you to return to the jury room for further consideration of your verdict. [Then read "Disagreement among jurors" instruction.]